Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Hoary Sunrays *Leucochrysum albicans* Photo Noel Young

Cobar Again

We spent 10 days in Broken Hill before heading off for Cobar to spend a little more time there than we have in the past, partly because I wanted to visit Mount Grenfell Historic Site.

Our first stop on the way was at a rest area, the second was about 200 metres further on when we found that the nearby pub was situated next to a lovely big body of water with lots of ducks and other waterbirds. I was able to pull onto the side of the road, but as usually happens, once I stopped the birds moved away, but I did identify Grey Teal, Black Duck, Hardheads, Musk Ducks, a couple of Swans, and a number of Black-tailed Native Hens, plus some grebes I couldn't identify for sure. The presence of water there also explained the 4 or 5 Swamp Harriers we had sighted over the previous 5 or 6 kilometres.

We drove through the red rocky hills of the Barrier Range, to plains, back to rocky hills before descending onto the Darling River at Wilcannia, and then across the river and out onto the flood plain where there we sighted numerous Great Egrets in the water that was still lying in places.

About 80 kms before Cobar we stopped at another rest area where caravans and motor homes were beginning to arrive for the night, and had our afternoon tea there, accompanied by the ubiquitous Apostlebirds, which worried the life out of the Council worker who was trying to keep the eating areas clean and tidy. The Apostlebirds weren't very fussy about what they left on the table, but he was! He also pointed out with rather grim amusement the Spotted Bower-bird under the big suspended 44 gallon drum rubbish bin, industriously pecking at the holes where it could get all sorts of interesting wriggly tit-bits! I went off for a short wander with the binoculars and spotted a parrot in the tree above me and found there were actually two beautiful Red-winged Parrots. The Council worker told us that "Crimson-wings" had only appeared in the Cobar area 3 or 4 years before.

On our second full day at Cobar we went off in warm sunshine (at last!) to Mount Grenfell Historic Site. We found afterwards that all unsealed roads in the Cobar

Shire were supposed to be closed, but though the Mount Grenfell one had been flood washed months before and was rough and stony in places, and waterworn in others, it was really quite okay. Bordered by several species of wattle (the only one I really recognised being Mulga *Acacia aneura*) the road was a delight. The main 'wildlife' though was feral goats. There seemed to be hundreds of them, including does with 2, 3 and 4 kids. We did see a couple of kangaroos and emus too, and a few sheep on Cubbee Station.

The picnic area at Mount Grenfell was new and good, and the walk up to the area, with its dark brown rocks, ferns, flowers, Eucalypts such as Coolibahs and Bimble Box with its shining leaves, and Cyprus pine, to where the aboriginal paintings are was one of the highlights of the trip. The 300 metre track up to the shallow caves with the paintings has been very professionally paved with rock chips from the area. They are trying very hard to preserve the paintings and I found the whole area well worth the visit, from the rocks, the rock-pool, the trees, many of which I could not name, and the atmosphere of isolation. I found a white flowering plant with holly-like leaves which I thought could have been an Isotome, and was very pleased with myself when I managed to identify it as *Isotoma petrea.*

There was a 5km walking trail to the top of the range, but as we had come unprepared we didn't walk it. There's nothing like getting important information before you set out!

The 30 km drive back to the main road yielded two more highlights – lots of Leopardwoods *Flindersia maculosa* which I hadn't seen as driver on the way out, and a Hooded Robin. He was looking rather tatty, and I thought they were probably breeding, hopefully successfully. We heard lots of birds, especially Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, but saw few species unfortunately.

Our six days in Cobar were largely lazy days, with the highlight, apart from the Mount Grenfell trip, being visits to Country Simplicity, a tearoom and gift shop in the main street, where we could choose from about 40 different teas and infusions, served in a glass teapot with an insert to hold the tea-leaves. That was removed when the tea was just how you like it, and placed in its special holder. A tea-light under the teapot keeps it just at the right temperature for your next cup. And the cups? Lovely delicate ones that even Mrs Bucket would have approved of.

[to be continued] Rita Mills

Part 1 of our Flinders Ranges trip August 2011

Denis Hurley

Christine and I left Castlemaine early August towing a van and hoping for good weather and kind winds. As it turned out, wild weather sent the petrol guage racing downhill on our trip home, but the rest was lovely!

Hattah Lakes provided a short stop and walk starting near the information centre. This area provided a different visual effect to central Victoria; Ring-neck Parrots, Red-capped Robins and other ground feeding birds were intent on the spring rush, building in hollow tree sites or feeding young already, a little ahead of our area

perhaps. Trying to get a photo of White-browed Babblers working the rough bark of very large native Pines and Bulokes was a case of watch, look and be on our way.

Mildura provided a stunning array of Eremophilas, Acacia, Eucalyptus and other plants. One, the Harlequin Mistletoe *Lysiana exocarpi,* I had not seen down here. The fact that all the plants are carefully arranged, and many named in their separate garden plots makes a long visit to Australian Inland Botanic Gardens a must on another trip. The abundance of flowers and insects plus fresh water provide a haven for an array, deafening at times, of native birds, seemingly disregarding our meandering walk. It is a credit to the volunteers who establish and maintain this lovely area.

From Wentworth on the Sturt Highway we saw a continuous selection of Black-shouldered Kites and Kestrels each side of the highway – thousands of white-ish patches in the hollow areas of the rolling plains had us curious for a while till we realised they were squashed mice – victims of highway traffic. We watched in awe as a Square-tailed Kite weaved down in the face of semis and cars, lined up and plucked a damaged but not flattened mouse – and wheeled away with it in its talons, seconds from disaster from us and an oncoming B-double. Who says birds are smart? These black winged Kites and Kestrels continued to be seen all the way to Hawker.

A giant tree (River Redgum) – a tourist attraction just out of Orroroo provided a great lunch spot. In its many hollows there were birds in residence, or seen passing by – Galahs, short-tailed Corella, Raven, Mallee Ring-neck Parrot, Black-shouldered Kite, 'feral' pigeons (dozens) and probably others these "non-birdos" missed. So, we were not bored travelling those first few days. The best was yet to come. [to be continued]

Morgans and Evenmore Tracks, 10/9/11

Rita Mills

Where were you all? A Field Naturalist Field Trip with a wealth of late Winter/early Spring flowers - and only five of us went! And four of us committee members. OK, I think there was footy on, and a south easterly wind, and the threat of a shower or two, but we all have raincoats, and the shower didn't come until we were about to head home anyway.

Ever since I first visited this track some years ago, it has been one of my favourite places in Spring, and though there is much timber and rubbish on the ground from environmental thinning we managed to enjoy our wander without breaking a leg.

There were flowers everywhere on Morgans Track: masses of Rough and Gold-dust Wattles, some Golden and Spreading Wattle, mounds of Fairy Waxflower, some a delicate pink, most white, more White Marianths than I have seen before, masses of Handsome Flat-pea, some Hardenbergia, only one Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea, but there were a few plants of Common Hovea still in flower. Pink Bells were scattered everywhere, and a few Common Correas, the long flowered local green form, were found here and there.

We climbed up onto a rocky outcrop and found Dusty Miller and Diggers Speedwell, and though the Speedwell wasn't in flower there were still some of the tiny white flowers on the Dusty Miller.

We also found Common and Twin-flower Beard Heaths, a few orchids, including Pink Fingers, Leopard Orchids and Nodding Greenhoods, and one or two flowers on the Heath Tea-tree.

We found lots of buds of orchids, herbs and shrubs, including the Common Wedge-pea. We went hunting for the Scented Bush-pea, but another visit when it is flowering will be needed to confirm whether the plants we found really are the right ones! Once there were scores of large shrubs which were spectacular in flower at the corner of Evenmore and Morgan Tracks, now there are only a few small young plants. I'm not sure why they tended to disappear, but it started before the drought got seriously under way.

There were few birds but just before we headed back George located a flock of Striated Thornbill up amongst the leaves of a Red Box, just as a shower started. If you weren't there you missed a really enjoyable afternoon.

Top left:
Dusty Miller *Spyridium parvifolium*

Left: White Marianth *Rhytidosporum procumbens*

Above:
Fairy Waxflower *Philotheca verrucosa*
photos – Noel Young

Wednesday Wildflower Walks

(for 'walks' read 'wanders'!)

Rita Mills

Sept 14. Wattle Flat, corner of Youngmans and Escape tracks

This area always yields some special plants, including many different orchids and the Goldfields Grevillea.

The drive along Youngmans track was a mass of yellow and magenta in places with wattles and Pink Bells.

Pink Bells *Tetratheca ciliata* - Noel Young

Plants seen in flower were:

White Marianth *Rhytidosporum procumbens*, Pink-bell *Tetratheca ciliata*, Fairy Wax *Philotheca verrucosa*, Erinallum or Tall Sundew *Drosera peltata* ssp. *auriculata,* Pink Fingers *Caladenia carnea,* Leopard Orchid *Diuris pardina*, a small Greencomb Spider-orchid which we didn't fully identify, Candles *Stackhousia monogyna*, Tall Rice-flower *Pimelea linifolia*, Purple Coral-pea *Hardenbergia violacea*, Tangled Guinea-flower *Hibbertia excruciates*, Downy Grevillea *G. alpina*, Goldfields Grevillea *G. dryophylla*, an uncommon species which is doing very well in the Wattle Flat bush, Rough, Gold-dust, Spreading and Golden Wattles *Acacias aspera, acinacea, genistifolia and pycnantha.*

Sept 21. Poverty Gully Track, off Ross Drive

This whole track always has something to offer. (As is my usual habit I will only include botanical names for plants not already recorded for this series of walks)

Caladenia carnea - Noel Young

Plants in flower:

Wax-lip Orchid, Leopard Orchid, Pink Fingers, Greencomb type Spider-orchid *Caladenia sp.* (*tensa*?), Yam Daisy *Microseris sp. 3*, Gorse Bitter-pea *Daviesia ulicifolia*, Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea *D leptophylla*, Tall Rice-flower, Fairy Waxflower, Billy Button *Craspedia variabilis*, Pink-bell, Black-anther Flax-lily *Dianella admixta*, Native Primrose (or Native Pansy) *Goodenia blackiana* , Early Nancy *Wurmbea dioica*, Slender Groundsel *Senecio phelleus*, Daphne Heath *Brachyloma daphnoides*,

Candles, Rough Bedstraw *Galium gaudichaudii*, Sticky Everlasting *Xerochrysum viscosum*, Grey Everlasting (just starting) *Ozothamnus obcordatus*, Golden, Spreading and Gold-dust Wattles.

Sept 28 We'll have to try again. It poured rain and we proved that we are chickens, not ducks!

CFNC at the Family Fun Day

Blessed with excellent weather, this event in Victory Park on Sunday 25th September drew a large crowd, including lots of children.

In a line-up of Landcare and nature groups, CFNC had a table squeezed in between Connecting Country and Parks Victoria. Thanks are due to Denis Hurley and Lisa Minchin for representing us on the day.

A Celebration of Maggie Oliver's life
with members of her family and friends at morning tea.
Saturday 29th October, 10am - 12 noon
At the Tea Rooms in the Botanical Gardens, Castlemaine
We plan to be outside, so please bring something to sit on. Should the weather be unkind, we will be inside the recently re-furbished Tea Rooms. We will be able to use the crockery from there, and Maggie's family wishes to provide morning tea
Any queries - Phee Broadway 54722513

NB after 12, those who wish to join
Richard Piesse on an excursion to the Fryers Ridge
will proceed from here. If you cannot attend the morning tea, we will pick you up at the usual Duke st. car park at **12.15pm**
Bring lunch and afternoon tea.

KABC roadside clean-up day - Saturday 22nd October

(organiser - Geoff Harris)
Meet at 9am at the corner of Pyrenees Highway and Golf Links Road

We generally work sections of the roadside for about 2 hours. Please note that KABC rules prohibit anyone under 16 from working on the roadside. Sturdy footwear and gloves advisable. Reflective vests and garbage bags will be supplied.

Observations

- Early September: Ern Perkins watched a Blue faced Honeyeater at the corner of Barker and Mostyn streets, hunting insects from the light pole
- Denis had the following notes from Merrifield st. Sept 5: A big,healthy looking Black Wallaby in the front garden. Sept 6: 10 YT Black Cockatoos heading west. Sept 7: Leopard Orchids out off Escape track plus Hardenbergia, Acacias etc. Sept 7: Speckled Warbler – first sighting for several months – may be nesting again.
- Geoff Harris told of a suicidal Tawny Frogmouth on White Gum rd. which caused him to brake hard when it landed on the road – must have seen an insect picked out in the headlights. It repeated the performance a couple of nights later at the same spot!
- On the way home from Bendigo via Sedgewick and Nth Harcourt we saw two Buff-banded Rails hurrying off the roadside opposite the gate to the horse property – Rita Mills
- Late September saw a flock of a dozen Yellow tailed Black Cockatoos fly across Happy Valley toward the Pine plantation – Noel Young
- Denis reported a flock of 20 Ibis in Happy Valley, and a large patch of Maroonhood Orchids in McManus Rd.
- Rita found carpets of Hoary Sunrays flowering near Tunnel Hill between the road and railway line

Hoary Sunray

photos by Noel Young

(see also cover photo)

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme
October 2011

Wednesday October 12: Wildflower Walk, leader Chris Morris

Fri October 14 meeting: speaker GEOFF CARR – the Dianella

Sat October 15 excursion: Harcourt area. Leader GEOFF CARR

Sat October 22 KABC roadside clean-up day see notice page 7

Sat October 29 10am - 12 noon Tea with Maggie's friends - see notice

Sat October 29 excursion: Fryers Ridge with RICHARD PIESSE*

*NB. Leaves 12.15pm from the car park opp. Castle Hotel but see notice page 6

Fri November 14 meeting: speakers ANNE and NIGEL HARLAND
Galapagos and Ecuador

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.
Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.
Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Denis Hurley's; 20 Merrifield St., at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2011
Ordinary membership: Single $27, Family $35
Pensioner or student: Single $24, Family $29
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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